ANGLICAN CHURCH
IN NORTH AMERICA

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Regarding the Verdict in the Ecclesiastical Trial of Bishop Stewart Ruch III

*NOTE: These FAQs will be updated as questions are received and noted with a date*

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*As of December 17, 2025*

**Who is on the Court, and how were they selected?**
Members of the Court for the Trial of a Bishop are elected by the Provincial Council and serve a three-year term. All members who stand for election must be active ACNA members in good standing. Legal training is not required, though nominees with legal experience often stand for election because of their relevant experience. The current Court was elected in 2024 and includes 3 Bishops (plus alternates); 2 Presbyters/priests (plus alternates), and 2 Adult Confirmed Members/Laity in Good Standing (plus alternates). Elected members of the Court for the Trial of a Bishop are listed here. Among those, these seven individuals served as active members on the Court that tried Bishop Ruch.

**Did any members recuse themselves? How does that work?**
Yes. Recusals are a normal part of any disciplinary process to ensure fairness and impartiality. The ACNA canons do not explicitly codify specific grounds for recusal from the Court for the Trial of a bishop; however, the Provincial Tribunal has ruled that any member of the Court may recuse themselves for any reason deemed appropriate. Some common reasons members of the Court might recuse themselves include:

- *Conflict of interest:* Prior involvement in the case, personal or diocesan ties to the accused or accuser.
- *Bias or partiality:* Relationships that could impair impartiality (e.g. serving in related prior trials or investigative bodies related to the matters in question)
- *Inability to serve impartially*: Any factor violating the presumption of innocence or due process.
- *Scheduling or personal conflicts:* Any circumstance, such as a medical diagnosis, a change in work commitments, childcare needs, or other significant life events, that could impede an elected member's ability to serve.

When a member of the Court recuses themselves, the President or Presiding member of the Court will call alternates to serve in their place. If there are not enough alternate elected members of the Court available to serve after all recusals are complete, the Archbishop may appoint a member of the Court to fill any vacancy, in consultation with the Executive Committee.

**How was the Provincial Prosecutor selected?**
The Provincial Prosecutor is appointed by the Archbishop (Canon IV.5.2.3). The prosecutor must have training in canon law and be a legally qualified person (i.e., one who has a degree or license and relevant experience in canon or civil law).

In the matter concerning Bishop Ruch, Archbishop Foley Beach appointed C. Alan Runyan, Esq., to serve as the Provincial Prosecutor. Upon his resignation in July, Archbishop Steve Wood initially appointed Archdeacon Job Serebrov, Esq., who promptly and voluntarily resigned due to a perceived conflict of interest, at which point Mr. Thomas Crapps, Esq., stepped in to serve as the Provincial Prosecutor for the portion of the trial that resumed October 8-13, 2025. Provincial prosecutors serve in a *pro bono* capacity (unpaid), though the Province may cover administrative, staff, or paralegal support for the prosecution.

**Did Bishop Ruch have legal representation? Does the ACNA pay for that?**
Yes, Bishop Ruch was represented by Mr. Alec Smith, Esq. As the Respondent in an ecclesiastical trial, Bishop Ruch was responsible for any legal costs related to his defense.

**Will there be an appeals process?**
In the case of a conviction, the defendant has 30 days to appeal to the Provincial Tribunal. The Province is not able to appeal a decision by the Court for the Trial of a Bishop. Because Bishop Ruch was acquitted (found innocent) on all four counts, no appeal is necessary.

**What does it mean when the Court says the province failed to provide "clear and convincing evidence" to meet its burden of proof?**

Legal standards of proof establish the level of certainty required for a court, judge, jury or other decision-making body to decide a case in favor of one party. These vary by context, but there are three established levels, or standards, of proof that govern how a given legal entity is directed to hear and assess the evidence presented to it:

- **"Preponderance of the Evidence"** is the lowest common civil standard that requires showing a fact is more likely true than not, over 50% probability. If evidence is 51% persuasive, it suffices even if it is not probable.
- **"Clear and Convincing Evidence"** is an intermediate civil standard applied in high-stakes cases such as fraud, parental rights termination, or disciplinary proceedings. Under this standard, evidence must produce a firm belief or conviction that the fact is "highly probable" or "substantially more likely true than untrue," often described as 70-80% certainty, though not quantified precisely. It requires precise, explicit proof without hesitation.
- **"Beyond a Reasonable Doubt"** is the highest criminal standard that demands moral certainty such that no reasonable alternative explanation remains.

> Prosecutors must prove guilt to a point that doubt is unreasonable to protect against wrongful convictions.

According to the ACNA Canons, in all ecclesiastical courts, "the standard of proof shall be by clear and convincing evidence" (Title IV, Canon 5, section 7).

**Why did this process take so long to complete?**
In its final order, the Court notes a number of procedural matters that caused confusion and delay throughout the investigative and disciplinary process related to Bishop Stewart Ruch III. The current provincial staff does not have visibility into many of these factors and cannot confidently speak to them, however the province intends to conduct a third-party review of the administration of Title IV as it concerns the Ruch matter, which may shed light on why certain aspects of the process were delayed.

**Will the Province conduct a review of any of the procedures related to the trial?**
In June 2022, in response to concerns about delays at that time, the College of Bishops called for the province to engage in "an independent review of Provincial practices related especially to the Diocese of the Upper Midwest," upon conclusion of the disciplinary process. Based on the minutes from that meeting the intent of this engagement was, "to learn from this experience and implement any protocols or processes that may emerge from the review."

In response to allegations of administrative and legal impropriety raised by the Provincial Prosecutor and Assistant Prosecutor this summer, the College of Bishops and Executive Committee reconfirmed this intention, though it was not communicated publicly at that time as active court proceedings were still underway.

After the trial proceedings concluded in October, the Executive Committee determined it would appoint a subcommittee to manage the process for finalizing the scope, selecting a firm, and setting a budget for an administrative review of how two different provincial staff teams - one serving under Archbishop Foley Beach (from the term 2019-2024) and one serving under Archbishop Steve Wood (from June 2024-2025) - handled the administration of the Title IV process in the matter concerning Bishop Stewart Ruch III. The members of this subcommittee are being finalized, and we expect this review to be conducted in early 2026.